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His best epitaph is the tribute to his memory which appeared in the newspapers the day after his death, and it possesses double value from the fact, that after half a century of criticism and examination, in 1853 there is nothing whatever to alter, and nothing to add save what his contemporaries could but prophecy,—that time has only added brilliancy to his reputation.

"Sir Joshua Reynolds was, on many accounts, one of the most memorable men of his time. He was the first Englishman who added the praise of the elegant arts to the other glories of his country. In taste—in grace—in facility—in happy invention—and in the richness and harmony of colouring, he was equal to the greatest masters of the renowned ages. In portrait he went beyond them: for he communicated to that description of the art, in which the English artists are most engaged, a variety, a fancy, and a dignity, derived from the higher branches, which even those who professed them in a superior manner did not always preserve when they delineated individual nature. His portraits reminded the spectator of the invention and the amenity of landscape. In painting portraits he appeared not to be raised upon that platform, but to descend upon it from a higher sphere.

"In full affluence of foreign and domestic fame, admired by the expert in art and by the learned in science, courted by the great, caressed by sovereign powers, and celebrated by distinguished poets, his native humility, modesty, and candour never forsook him, even on surprise or provocation; nor was the least degree of arrogance or assumption visible to the most scrutinizing eye in any part of his conduct or discourse.

"His talents of every kind, powerful by nature and not meanly cultivated by letters—his social virtues in all the relations and all the habitudes of life, rendered him the centre of a very great and unparalleled variety of agreeable societies."

ON THE MADONNA PIA OF DANTE.*

"Deh, quando tu sarai tornato al mondo
Eriposato della lunga via,
Sequitò 'l terzo spirito al secondo,
Ricòrdite di me che son la Pia;
Siena mi fe'; disféce mi Maremma;
Salsi colui che 'nnanellata pria,
Disposando, m'avea con la sua gemma."

THESE verses (Purgatorio, Canto V. 130) have been justly said to contain the most affecting and comprehensive of all brief stories; the more affecting because the circumstances are historically true. It is one of the many tragedies of Italian history, and may be translated somewhat as follows:—

"When to the world thou hast return'd, and rested
From this long, weary road, said the third spirit,
Ah, then remember me, for I am Pia;
Siena gave me birth; the marshes, death;
Who placed the ring upon my hand, knows this."*

The substance of this episode is to be found in Mr. Hazlitt's

* We would not have presumed to differ from Mr. Cary by offering this translation, but for a deviation from the text in which we do not concur. It will be observed in his version that Madonna speaks in the past tense,—"*I was Pia*;" whereas the literal version is "*I am Pia*;" and this distinction, trifling in itself, becomes more important when we recollect that Dante repeatedly causes the departed souls to speak of themselves as continuing the titles they bore while living, thus carrying their identity beyond the grave, together with their loves and hatreds—all of which are highly characteristic of the poet. Of the *inversions* of the following we say nothing:—

"Ah! when thou to the world shalt be returned,
And rested after thy long road," so spake
Next the third spirit; "then remember me.
I once was Pia. Siena gave me life;
Maremma took it from me. That he knows
Who me with jewell'd ring had first espoused."

CARY'S *Dante*, p. 202.

"Journey through France and Italy," and may be thus related:—

Nello della Pietra, a noble Italian gentleman, obtained in marriage the hand of Madonna Pia, sole heiress of the Ptolomei, the wealthiest and most ancient family in Sienna. Her beauty, which was the admiration of all Tuscany, gave rise to jealousy in the breast of her husband, which, envenomed by malicious reports, and suspicions continually revived, led to a frightful catastrophe. It is not easy to determine, at this day, if the lady were altogether innocent; but Dante has represented her as such, by placing her among those Delayers of Penitence, who, on meeting violent deaths, repented at the last moment. Had he chosen to believe in her guilt, he would have intimated that opinion by associating her with Francesca in the second Circle of Hell: but this is, at all events, the most pleasing view of the question, and therefore the most becoming in a poet.

Madonna's husband carried her with him into the marshes of Volterra, celebrated then, as now, for the pestiferous properties of the air. Never would he tell his wife the reason of her banishment into so dangerous a place. His pride disdained to pronounce either complaint or accusation. He lived with her alone, in a deserted and gloomy tower, now mouldering into ruins on the sea-shore; he never broke his disdainful silence; never replied to the questionings of his youthful bride; never listened to her entreaties. She wept, but her tears were unheeded; she supplicated, but her cries were echoed back by the walls of her prison, or addressed to a heart more obdurate than the stone.

He waited, unmoved, for the air to produce its fatal effects. The vapours of this unwholesome swamp were not slow in tarnishing features the most beautiful, they say, that, in that age had appeared upon earth. In a few months she died. Some chroniclers of these remote times have asserted that Nello employed the dagger to hasten his revenge; but it is more in character with his sullen hate to suppose that he preferred to remain a patient and pitiless spectator of her lingering decline. That she expired in the marshes in some horrible manner, whether by the steel, or poison, or the equally fatal, but more tardy effects of the atmosphere, is certain; but the mode of her death remained a mystery, even to her contemporaries, and time has not aided in its elucidation. Nello della Pietra survived, to pass the rest of his days in a silence which was never broken.

It is to be regretted that no record of this event remains to establish the innocence of the unfortunate lady, or, at least, to show on what ground her husband wreaked upon her his base and deliberate vengeance. A portrait is yet to be seen in Rome of that other hapless heroine of domestic tragedy, Beatrice Cenci. How invaluable would such an one be of Madonna Pia? Its worth, too, would be greater, not only on account of its remoter antiquity, but for the more interesting figure of the original. We should imagine her a gentler and more patient beauty than the resolute Beatrice. We may picture her with the golden locks and innocent face of a Madonna of Guido; but with eyes of more intellectual loveliness—eyes into which one might gaze for ever, without penetrating all the depths of their sweet gravity. Such as Coleridge ascribed to Christabel:—

— "both blue eyes more bright than clear,
Each about to have a tear."—Coleridge.

If we should not be digressing too far from our subject, it will be interesting to compare this fancied portrait with Shelley's description of the painting in the Colonna Palace.* "The modelling of her face," says the poet, "is exquisitely delicate; the eyebrows are distinct and arched; the lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed, and which it seems as if death scarcely could extinguish. Her forehead is large and clear; her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beauti-

* The portrait of Beatrice Cenci, just mentioned.

fully tender and serene. In the whole mien there is a simplicity and dignity, which, united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow, are inexpressibly pathetic. Beatrice Cenci appears to have been one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell together, without destroying one another: her nature was simple and profound."

Beautiful as this is, we should fancy a tenderer grace in the features of the Tuscan heroine—the gentle eyes of Madonna Pia would not be capable of the "awe inspiring gaze," and still less of "that stern yet piteous look," and "the terrible resentment" that Shelley attributes to *La Cenci*. The passing traveller may turn aside on his journey to visit the weary waste in which this

— "stern round tower of other days"

is yet standing; and the sailor, speeding over the blue waters of the Mediterranean in his little felucca, between Elba and Leghorn, thinks with a sigh of *la bella Pia*, when he sees on the low and dreary coast the crumbling walls of that

— "ghastly prison that eternally
Holds its blind visage out to the lone sea."

There is not, perhaps, so desolate a spot to be found on the whole coast of Italy as the Maremma* of Volterra. The town is at a distance of some ten or fifteen miles from the shore, and a range of mountains divides it from the gloomy swamp. The tower is but too well chosen for a scene of murder, and the count's helpless victim might indeed be dismayed at the surrounding scene. Before her she saw only the boundless ocean, the sound of whose perpetual unrest is so wearying to the sick and the sorrowful; behind, the imprisoning mountains towering on the horizon; and all around, the

— "vast morasses
Deserted by the fever-stricken serf,
All overgrown with reeds and long rank grasses,
And hillocks heaped of moss-inwoven turf;
And there the huge and speckled aloe made,
Rooted in stones, a broad and pointed shade."

Brevity is one of the surest indications of power, and, when united with intensity, makes a great poet. Chaucer is both brief and intense. Shakspeare is always intense; and sometimes diffuse; but he can be brief likewise, as we shall show presently. Milton is fearfully intense; and if we chose to mention one or two later names, we might instance Wordsworth, Alfieri, Byron, and Bulwer, as uniting these qualities in a remarkable degree. But perhaps no poet that ever lived was so brief and so intense as Dante. We cannot remember seven lines of any other poem whatever comprising so short and sad a tale as this of Madonna Pia. Every word is stamped with an earnestness and truth that is positively startling. The story is written as if by the hand of fate—love, jealousy, murder. It occupies but a moment to relate, but it would take longer than a life-time to forget. It reminds one of those primitive efforts at printing first made by the Chinese, in which each page was carved, with slow and painful industry, out of a solid block of the hardest wood, and when complete the type and the record were alike imperishable.

The nearest approach to it in concentrativeness of meaning and expression, is the beautifully touching episode in the "Twelfth Night," where Viola, with an exquisite mixture of truth and evasion, relates her own tale to the Duke of Illyria:—

VIOLA.—My father had a daughter lov'd a man
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

* It may be as well to observe that *Maremma* signifies bordering on the sea, and has no equivalent in our language. We cannot translate it as *beach*, *shore*, &c., because those words are represented by *lido*, *viva*, *spiaggia*, and others: but its meaning may easily be caught by comparing it with the names of some of our English towns—St. Leonard's-on-Sea, for instance. But it must be remembered, that "*Maremma*" is not applicable to towns only, but to any part of a territory on the coast, as, in this case, to the neighbouring fens.

DUKE.—And what's her history?

VIOLA.—*A blank, my lord: she never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought;
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love, indeed?
We men may say more, swear more; but, indeed
Our shows are more than will; for still we prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love.*

DUKE.—But died thy sister of her love, my boy?

VIOLA.—*I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers too.*"—TWELFTH NIGHT, act 2, s. 5.

Nothing can exceed the surpassing delicacy and grace of these concluding lines.

It may be objected that the quotation is less brief than Dante's; that it is wanting in that historical accuracy which deepens every charm of the tale of Madonna Pia; and, to go still farther, that it is not even true according to the play, but labours under the disadvantage of being a fiction within a fiction.

To this we can reply with a word or two from Mr. Leigh Hunt's paper on "The Realities of Imagination:"—

"There is not a more unthinking way of talking, than to say such and such pains and pleasures are only imaginary, and therefore to be got rid of, or undervalued accordingly. There is nothing imaginary, in the common acceptance of the word. The logic of Moses in the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' is good argument here:—'Whatever is, is.' Whatever touches us, whatever moves us, does touch, and does move us. We recognise the reality of it, as we do that of a hand in the dark. We might as well say that a sight which makes us laugh, or a blow which brings tears into our eyes, is imaginary, as that anything else is imaginary which makes us laugh or weep. We can only judge of things by their effects."

We will believe, then, that this episode, taken by itself, is as true as the tale of Madonna Pia; and while we acknowledge willingly the superior brevity of the Italian, we may, at least, have the pleasure of reflecting, that in "Twelfth Night," the Englishman approaches nearer to him than any one else. And, in any farther comparison between the two poets, let us rejoice to think that in gentleness, chivalry, humanity, and all those higher attributes which ennoble the bard, and make him almost an angel among men, our divine Shakspeare goes as far beyond Dante, as that wondrous Florentine excels all other writers in gloom and superstition.

WE ALL MIGHT DO GOOD.

We all might do good
Where we often do ill—
There is always the way
If there be but the will;
Though it be but a word
Kindly breathed or suppressed,
It may guard off some pain
Or give peace to some breast.

We all might do good
In a thousand small ways—
In forbearing to flatter,
Yet yielding due praise;
In sparing ill rumour,
Reproving wrong done,
And treating but kindly
The heart we have won.

We all might do good,
Whether lowly or great,
For the deed is not gauged
By the purse or estate.
If it be but a cup
Of cold water that's given,
Like the widow's two mites,
It is something for heaven.